

A WARNING TO US ALL

The Governor-General, Sir Paul Reeves, opened Paparoa National Park on December 5, 1987. His speech on the danger of excessive commercialisation of national parks, reproduced here with his kind permission, will strike a chord with many members.

The load of junk and garbage left by climbers of Everest should act as warning to us all, especially when we set aside land for a national park.

I listened carefully to the minister when she spoke of integrating conservation and development and the interest which they represent.

I want to suggest that within the particular sphere of conservation there are still issues which must be faced.

Just as the cathedrals of England can be endangered by the sheer numbers of people who visit them, so we can love our national parks to death.

Surveys indicate people want to visit national parks; 1,000,000 per year visit Tongariro. I know that in management of national parks there are different zones of recreational use going from high intensity to restricted access. There is eternal difficulty that while we want people to enjoy the land, how do they do that without changing it forever?

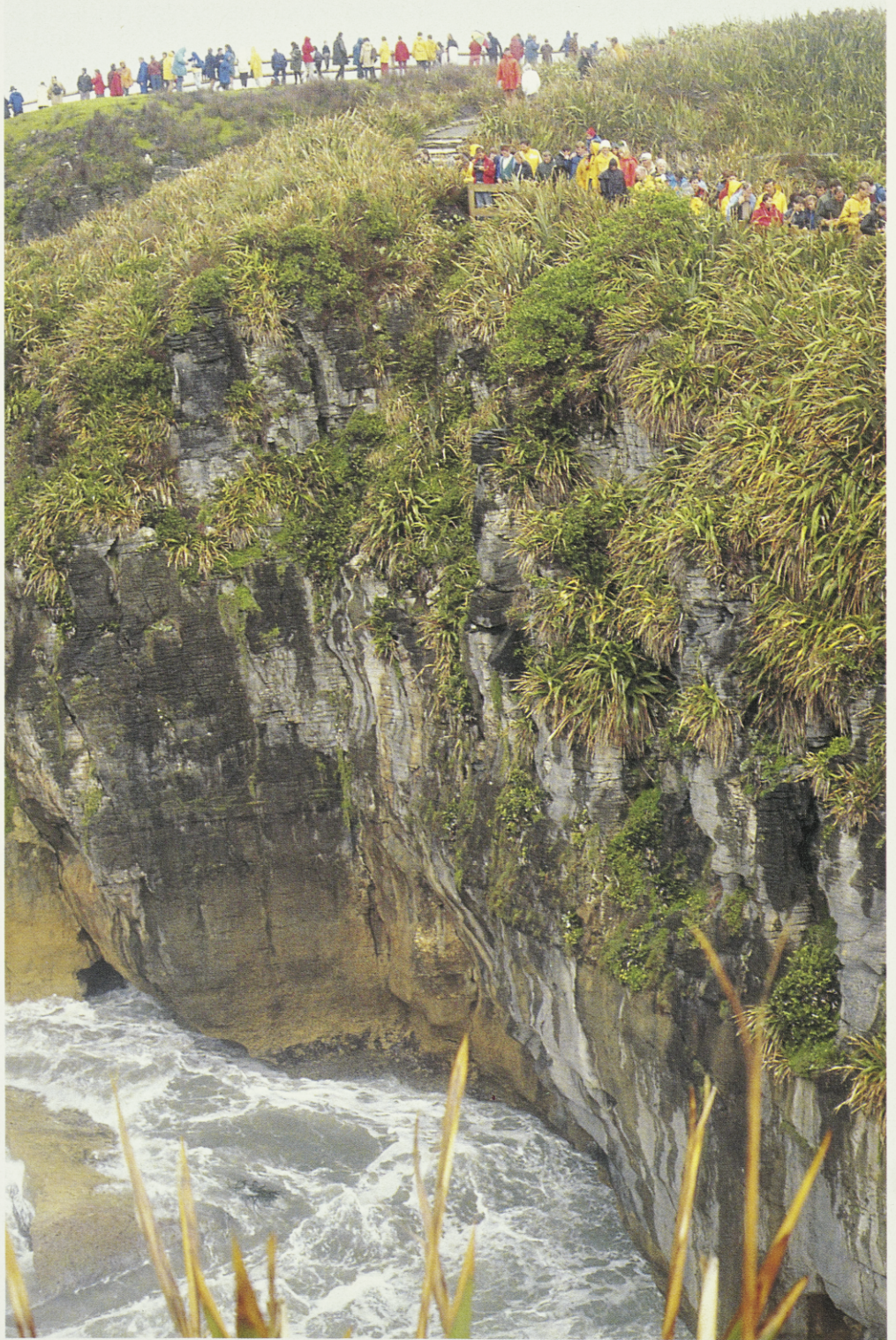
I understand the Grand Canyon reverberates to the sound of 274 helicopter and small plane flights each day. Presently they are working to get cars and concessions out of Yellowstone Park and planes out of the Grand Canyon.

I realise management involves compromise and that is why the staff of national parks must be both sensible and sensitive. I read recently New Zealand needs a clear philosophy of values for national parks. Is the aim, asked the writer, a natural world free of consumer comfort and impact where time and space are measured by natural rhythms and where people see, hear, taste, and smell only what they can never create?

Well, it probably is. I would prefer to say that national parks are not fun parlours. The minister has stated that the Department of Conservation will seek to develop a good working relationship with the tourist industry and not allow this park to be spoiled by extensive commercialism. I hope the tourist industry shares the same aim. When you decide to bring people to where they have not been before, that is a very significant decision. When you make things of beauty accessible, for the first time, you are trusting in people's sense of responsibility. Management may reduce the risk but it still remains.

National parks ultimately raise questions about us. What sort of people are we? Do we have a loving relationship with the natural order or do we charge around like bulls in a china shop?

Time will tell, but I am very glad to declare this Paparoa National Park open. 🦜



Guests at the opening of Paparoa National Park high above the surging sea that shapes the Pancake Rocks. Photo: Alan Mark